



Tip of the Month for June 2022

Volunteer Guiding Philosophy

Source: VLN's Volunteer Handbook

Volunteer Lawyers Network is based on the core founding principle that private attorneys must dedicate some time to representing clients in poverty because:

- Pro bono services increase overall access to the legal services necessary for stability and well-being in our communities.
- All attorneys, not just legal aid attorneys and public defenders, share the profound professional responsibility to ensure that the rule of law extends to everyone in our communities.
- Those in poverty, who otherwise may experience the law as arbitrary and predatory, have more experience of the law's protections and fairness, leading to greater community-wide respect for the system and engagement.
- Lawyers who provide pro bono legal services benefit in that they:
 - Get the satisfaction of helping vulnerable individuals and families in our communities and directly contribute to their well-being.
 - Gain communication and other skills that improve their services to paying clients.
 - Participate in an enterprise which crosses over social barriers.
 - Connect on a human level with those who may be quite different from them, which may dispel stereotypes and increase inquisitiveness and empathy.
 - Gain first-hand knowledge about the experience of those living in poverty and the resilience and resources of people who survive in poverty.
 - Contribute more knowledgeably to discussions about community-wide issues in various aspects of their lives.
 - Make more informed philanthropic and policy choices.
 - Promote a more efficient court system.

- The community as a whole is enriched as:
 - People form relationships across social barriers, which is a necessary ingredient of any successful and positive social change.
 - More people of influence become advocates for those whom the legal system has otherwise not served.
 - More people are freed up to meet their human potential and participate more fully in our social and economic systems.
 - Increased knowledge leads to policy decisions that are more effective in promoting safety, well-being and dignity for all.

To this end, Volunteer Lawyers Network serves the community by bringing private attorneys to meaningful pro bono work that is responsive to the needs of the community by:

- Designing programs that respond to the emerging and immediate needs of those in poverty.
- Leveraging attorney hours by screening clients for financial and merit eligibility, providing write-ups of their issue, providing case coordination assistance, and more.
- Educating attorneys about the laws that impact those living in poverty.
- Creating form templates, manuals, CLE resources and access to on-staff Resource/Managing Attorneys to help lawyers meet their professional responsibility to provide competent and diligent services.
- Having mentor attorneys on hand to answer specific legal questions from volunteer attorneys.
- Maintaining and providing expertise in various legal issues through on-staff Resource/Managing Attorneys.
- Providing attorneys with Elimination of Bias trainings essential to help them understand the barriers those in poverty face when trying to access the justice system, understand client behavior in the context of living in poverty as opposed to privilege, increase the quality of services provided, increase client outcomes, and increase volunteer satisfaction.
- Providing structured and supported ways for attorneys to meet their community leadership responsibilities of promoting justice and making justice equally accessible to all people.

NOTE: To see the complete Volunteer Handbook, go to VLN's Volunteer Resource page on our website: [Volunteer Resources - Volunteer Lawyers Network \(vlnmn.org\)](http://vlnmn.org)